

August 27, 2008

The making of SIOP 63?

50 years ago in 58, Pres. Eisenhower started a planning process that led within a couple of years to the Single Integration Operational Plan, SIOP 62. In December or 1960 just after the election the JCS met with the President and Sec Def Thomas Gates to discuss, raise objections to and to reach Pres. Decisions on plan to go into effect April 1, 1961. Strong historical resembles to Wannsee of 1942 where various agencies were allocated their tasks of carrying out the final solution of the Jewish problem in Germany and the occupied territories.

The plan accepted by the President and the Secretary of Defense called for the deliberate, organized, extermination of some roughly 400 million people in the Sino-Soviet bloc and the regretted but unavoidable death of some 200 million others in some friendly or neutral countries. As several of the participants pointed out in the planning process, such estimates were undoubtedly very greatly understated since the calculations left out a number of massive contributors to death tolls [such as the effects of fire]. While the requirements of the planning called for killing at least 1/3rd of the Russian population – in itself a massive genocide.

In figuring out the forces required to meet this goal the planners looked only at the blast effects of thermonuclear weapons, ignoring fire and radiation – both. Moreover, in looking at damage they assumed one weapon per target although four or more were generally scheduled for a given target on the assumption that there would be attrition. Moreover, the damage from “misses” was not included even though as one service pointed out, such “misses would kill a lot of Russians & Chinese.” Moreover, during such an attack, there would be ongoing attacks from US carriers and tactical forces in the Pacific and Europe. None of these were counted in the effects.

Some factors still unrecognized in the analysis by the National Security Archive (William Burr) in discussing the various documents leading up to the plan.

What's striking to me in reading this now in August of 2008, incredible defects I saw in planning as of 59, 60 & 61 had in fact been noted by planners and chiefs of navy and army in those years though their criticisms had been in effect ignored by SAC and final decisions by Gates and Eisenhower. This was true despite the fact that some of these misgivings appeared to be shared by Eisenhower, in particular the vast "overkill" a term used as much by Army, Navy & Eisenhower as by outside critics of the arms race. This was also the reaction recorded by Kennedy, who inherited the plan, by Johnson, and even by Nixon when he was introduced to it in 1969 and found that the smallest option available to him in general war would kill 90 million people. And yet, not one president took steps to change the plans, fire the planners or change overall []. All three did call for planning of somewhat smaller options as well.

A peculiarity of SIOP 62 reflecting the recommendation of the Net Evaluation Subcommittee, in NSC study 2009, of a single target list to be destroyed under all circumstances of general war was that the war planning comprised only a single target list with the same set of targets to be destroyed no matter how the war had arisen.

As a number of people observed this defied logic in light of two very broadly different ways in which general war might commence: roughly by the Soviet Union or by the US. The original study of the requirements for "deterrence" ignored a fundamental ambiguity in the word deterrence regarding what actions of the Soviets were to be deterred. For the public, the word deterrence usually meant deterring a Soviet surprise attack against the US, deterring a Soviet first strike, but US planning under the JCS in the 1950s had always focused on the problem of deterring a Soviet conventional attack with its massive forces against West Europe and doing this by threatening and preparing a US first strike against the Soviet Union. This case in which the first weapons to be launched against the homeland of the superpower adversary were to be launched by the US, referred to a US initiative, "preemptive" first strike [].

August 25, 2008; rough notes of Dan with some editing and addition by TR

Not a history of the development of the SIOP & strategic planning or a literal history of my own involvement in it, like a biography.

I might later contribute to either of those, or comments on others, like D. Ball or D.A. Rosenberg. Want to get into peoples minds, world since 1958 and a sense of how we got there over previous 40 years since the 1st World War, strategic bombing doctrine and practice in WW II. I want people to understand the depth of the abyss on the edge of which we have been dancing for the last 60 years, civilization destroying scale of it and 2nd, to recognize how close we have come to falling into the abyss on a number of occasions and 3rd) way in which risk depended on readiness of civilian and military leadership to threaten and carry out threats of massive nuclear war and 4th) reliance on threats and desire to sustain their credibility has led to posture prone to accident, false alarm and unauthorized action.

Yet risk not solely a matter of system malfunction but [of system function], including the secret readiness of men in power actually to implement nuclear war; this is not only unknown to the general public it is also almost unimaginable. Yet in fact this doomsday machine was planned, constructed and contemplated by those people who designed it and those who are in charge of it (though even they did not understand for sometime the Doomsday nature of the mousetrap perhaps).

A large scale nuclear war would probably merit a post war analyst if any exists, like Richard Betts & Leslie Gelb's book on Vietnam, *The System Worked* and would have exactly the same meaning and same validity.

The point here is to make the general public and elites aware of the extreme danger - one could say existential - that has been confronting the human species and most other forms of life for the last 50 plus years, a little more than a half century, especially since the deployment of thermonuclear weapons; danger not only in terms of **scale** but also **probability**.

I would like them to recognize the danger that exists and what will be required to reduce it and that's not only better attention but involves changing the very world view of the leaders, designers and managers of these nuclear systems, their political strategies and political aims as well as of course the public.

For example, the actual implementation of strategic bombing targeting civilians goes back in the 1920s to the imperial objectives of the British and American empires, ironically enough, the imperial objectives of the British in the Middle East with respect to oil and concretely in Iraq, where bombing from airplanes recommended itself to controlling Iraq without deployments and casualties. And the same was true for the US in Nicaragua and elsewhere and for the British in Yemen and the Northwestern frontier provinces in India; these that led the British to not support a ban on bombing from air in

arms control conferences in Geneva. And bomber Harris got his charge for British Air Command precisely in these colonial operations.

Outline:

Introduction (the piece of paper, the doomsday machine, 325 million/600 million estimate; this is the way it was)

Chapter 1: Then the assertion, irony because of first introduction to nuclear war; question, how did I get into this; Cranbrook; Something not very long followed by ironic that I should be involved because of your introduction to nuclear weapons; second segment of cranbrook and my father and mention in a page or two, the accident; horror of nuclear.

Chapter 2: RAND & the “Wizards of Armageddon”: How I came to RAND and was exposed to Missile Gap (Pearl Harbor problem); introduction to C3I work

Here's how I came to be at RAND (work on decision theory, along with work in Marines and Society of Fellows, Katzenbach at Harvard, positive view towards working with the military; immediately exposed to height of missile gap concerns and concerns with vulnerability which had preoccupied Rand since 54, SAC vulnerability, bombers, missiles; view of Soviets, somewhat more cautious and deterrable Nazis. Soviets as ruthless and globally ambitious as Hitler, but more patient, less reckless, deterrable. Deterring Soviets problem took ingenuity, creativity, etc., but could be done. Posed how working on the problem; reflecting earlier abhorrence working night and day total preoccupation averting Soviet nuclear Pearl Harbor.

Chapter 3: A Theory of Threats: Lowell lectures, bargaining and Berlin, adapting Schelling's work to formal framework and decision theory. **back at Harvard threats and blackmail, appearing to occur right at that time, Khrushchev, Berlin.**

Chapter 4: Adventures in Command & Control (&/or lack thereof): Go back in the Summer of 1959, and pretty soon by Summer's end go to the Pacific; chose to go into command and control work having worked on that somewhat the previous summer of 1958; some unusual initiatives, part of whole RAND thing. Question to forerunner of permissive action links, but tension between not being vulnerable to a Soviet first strike but unauthorized use. **Then gradual discovery in Pacific and DC nature of plans and extreme concern for modifying them, even as deterrent plans; looked like terrible plans to achieve it;**

exposure in Pacific and in Washington to actual details of planning and posture which at first exposure grotesquely unsuited to problem of deterrence and inefficient in the extreme and dangerous.

Chapter 5: Delegation & the Doomsday Machine (or Delegation, the Doomsday Machine & the Fog of War); necessity of assuring response to Soviet surprise attack; widespread official delegation so alert force on hair trigger as authorized by great many individuals. Thus problem of “accidental” war. Reality was four missiles. 600 million planning for nothing other than a first-strike. Was to be triggered by wide variety of circumstances, conflict with Soviet forces, Berlin, Iran, Yugoslavia.

Sequence:

A reason that the military was very concerned to prevent President or assistants from having physical capability to block attack; didn't trust civilians to direct attack or to allow it to be carried through; worried not only about President but his advisors. Didn't want SecDef to decide (remember battles over Quemoy & Matsu).

Analogy with what I had read about Mobilization plans of WW I very strong; feared they couldn't get the Czar to order far reaching mobilization plans, or fear of trying to revise plans and lead them vulnerable to immediate defeat. Had to work to get Czar to give ok, and prevent him – out of communications – to modify it.

Head of 7th fleet, Admr. Kvett, appalled at idea of not fighting Russia and China at the same time.

Chapter 6: Flashback to the Marines & the Fog of War

Work as Marine Corps officer, not robotic obeyer of superior orders; in fact, especially for officers, what I absorbed, was that were to use your mind in implementing orders and should be prepared to question orders that looked inappropriate. Unthinking obedience not the way you were expected to behave; though you were not to question the basic underlying mission – don't fight the problem. Point here is that in my own mind, for better or worse, I could imagine circumstances in which I would disobey the letter of orders in order to achieve a goal, higher level mission; could conceive of taking chance of opposing objective if I thought a better way to do it or likely to lead to disaster. I could think of that easily, which is to say under extraordinary circumstances. [So your Marine training has ultimately served you well in the anti-nuclear movement!]

Once instance of that, harbor of Alexandria, 1956, taking out American evacuees from Egypt, not clear Egyptians would let us do this; had even possibility of landing plan on beach head, taken out if necessary. Major C, might be interned but demand debark and enter internment camp, on grounds parties to the war; allies were but we weren't. Thought he must be joking. I said, “are you kidding?” This is a reinforced marine battalion. The Major look at me and say, “well that maybe what we have to do and that includes you”; I said “they're not going to intern me.” Said “that means you, Lt. Ellsberg.”

So I found landing craft could be lowered manually, had water in it I saw, and drew out maps, being operations officer, of surrounding area, where I was going to go,

toward Alamein, drew 45 from armour and ammunition and thought of people I would ask to come with me at the last minute. Not going to be interned by Egyptians.

Also had whether this was pure fantasy or a little beyond; before Alexandria, Russians were occupying Budapest and when I saw accounts who were using molotovs against Russian tanks and had fantasy of taking leave or liberty, getting ashore, 3.5 rocket launcher and 2 or 3 rockets, cause of the idea of hitting one lead tanker in rocket in street and then tank in back of column, have a shooting gallery of MC of dozen stalled tanks; thought about it.

Point was, I was quite serious about leaving ship. Point, when I looked at command and control problems; looked at what could pilot or squadron leader to carry out a war plan even with no authenticated orders; if he felt no orders didn't reflect lack of desire of president but failure of communications [fog of war] way I might have acted as lt. – higher command would've wanted. Like in **Dr. Strangelove, Crimson Tide**. There I discovered this was very possible, even perhaps likely. Promulgate that order to others orders to go. Like in Dr. Strangelove gets through all obstacles to getting bomb on target not knowing high command trying to stop it.

Doomsday machine or hair trigger with many fingers, to be used in wide variety of circumstances.

Chapter 7: (Re) writing Nuclear War Plans

Irony of me working on plans to cut down millions (Cranbrook)

Elements: emphasis on 2nd strike counter-force, retaliatory mode, rationale for that.

Such plans had a first-strike character, however well achieved retaliating, would do better striking first, pretty close to optimal first strike plans.

Another big element: my new plan and the rationale for it, point by point (why there was resistance, and what answer was; what needed to be changed and what would take to change it)

Chapter 8: A Different World: The Missile Gap Vanishes (for me)

Exposure of missile gap; lack of effort by anyone including me to think the entire problem; did not suggest to me arms control or disarmament; did in my case refocus on risk of nuclear war coming from; Maybe worth getting in some mention of points to be discussed in detail later (the actual state, revealed later that year, of the Missile Gap (the supposed context of this piece of paper, Russia supposedly having hundreds to thousands of ICBMs, facing the US with destruction)

Chapter 9: Decision Making Under Uncertainty

Spend Spring of 62 on thesis on uncertainty;

Chapter 10: Nuclear & Other Crises: Cuba, Berlin, Quemoy

CMC refocuses me on how war can come mistaken communication, mistaken action, threats and arise out of crises. Focuses me studying on nuclear crises; study 58 crisis, Berlin, Cuban crisis, studies of command and control (Laos & Bay of Pigs) (CIA, all deleted)

U2 and breakdown of Paris summit; the Skybolt crisis. Studied these in 1963 and 1964 (this year with good access) and then to Vietnam

Chapter 11: Revelations: Vietnam, First Use Nuclear Threats & the Madman Theory

Vietnam but become aware in 1974 of first-use planning for Vietnam by Nixon. And how close we came in 1969. And later that sends me into studying first use in general.

Ch. 12: Nuclear Weapons & Foreign Policy

Notes on outline, for Dan's book.

Starts off with the piece of paper.

Part I:

Intro: The Piece of Paper, or Discovering the Doomsday Machine, or just the intro. Or first about nuclear threats around Iran, and Georgia, FSU!

Thinking the Unthinkable: Sputnik & the Missile Gap

RAND & the "Wizards of Armageddon" (will include earlier work on risk, decision-making and uncertainty).

A Theory of Threats

Part II: Dr. Strangelove & the Doomsday Machine

Discovering the Mousetrap (Part I) (Planning for Armageddon (delegation))

Discovering the Mousetrap (Part II)

96 Trombones

The Origins of Armageddon: Strategic Bombing

Going to Rand, but titled missile gap, transcription, August 15, 2008

The premise of our strategic work at Rand in the Summer of 1958 was that the Soviets were probably in a crash program to build a large ICBM force. If they were in a crash program, they might have as early of 1959 or at the latest by 1960 a large number, meaning hundreds, let's say 300 by 1960, at which point we would have hardly any. That was the missile gap.

A question was what could they do with those. The general implication in the nuclear age but with the advent of the H-bomb in particular was that nuclear weapons were so destructive that even a few of them would be devastating and that there was no possible way of preventing a strongly armed opponent from using them in retaliation for any blow you might strike. So there was an inevitable standoff between two nuclear powers that neither one could launch an attack without the virtual certainty of total devastation in return so that it could not be of any use to do it.

It was understood that there was some danger given that they existed of some kind of irrational or accidental explosion but that there could be no rational choice of launching a war. You could bluff, you could threaten and Dulles did threaten but they were criticized by his Democratic opponents like Acheson as threats of madness, of irrationality and therefore not really credible. That was the framework of the argument. It was pretty well accepted. They were fearsome weapons to threaten but the threat almost had to be a threat of irrational use.

The perspective that had developed at RAND from 1954 on, in particular by Albert Wholstetter was that the vulnerability of one's own military forces and your ability to retaliate had been very greatly underestimated and that the atomic but especially thermonuclear H-bombs were so lethal that there really was the possibility of disarming the other side or at least if that were not certain that if you were prepared to gamble that there was a real possibility to disarm the other side altogether in a way was a way that was not possible without nuclear explosions.

So the RAND proposition that had been advanced by four of the people who were at that table – first a report in 1954 that had to do with bomber forces, almost entirely, not missiles – and then in a top secret report, R-290, which I wasn't able to see right away because I hadn't been cleared yet, which came out in 1956 I believe, a year before I arrived – with the very startling conclusion that even with a missile force, assumed in the 1956 report, that this combined with the bombers that the Soviet Union might well be able to disarm the United States altogether with a cleverly designed attack. The measures to prevent that at great expense and effort by the Strategic Air Command might be effective against a very traditional kind of attack or poorly designed attack of which we had experience in history might work but against a really well designed attack might fail.

So again you had somewhat the perspective of the game theory approach without consciousness of this as a whole by the people. This was something easily conceptualized in game theory terms as a problem of confronting a rational, clever, calculating adversary. [like in the Pallid Giant, or as elaborated in Schelling's reciprocal fear of surprise attack]. How to work with this? Game theory purported to give you an answer for how to deal with that. It didn't really give you a solution but it did give you some concepts for thinking about the problem that I found helpful. There were two things I fell into.

As an intellectual climate, these people were very, very smart, original, creative thinkers. So I sat down in 1957 at 27 and they tended to be, the youngest of them were about 11 years older except for Alain who was my same age. They tended to be about 10 or 11 years older and Wholstetter was about 20 years older. I remember one of the first things was that I was taking notes on what they were saying and I ventured to make a comment and Herman Kahn's huge jab of the hut figure, 300 pounds sitting across from me and looked over at me and said, "you're absolutely wrong." And my heart warmed because I hadn't had an intellectual environment like this since the *Crimson* which was extremely aggressive in our internal critiques of each other, savage. But in academic life I found to my great disappointment, you couldn't possibly say to someone "you're wrong," because you'd be saying, like you're the anti-Christ, what are you doing at this university at all. You don't deserve to be at this table, or this room. You could never say that, you had to be tactful all the time. And of course in the Marines you could be wrong in your opinions but there wasn't any intellectual discussion at all.

So I felt I was back at the *Crimson* and I was absolutely taken by this and it proved to be the case. You didn't pull any punches in this thing, "wrong, that's ridiculous, no, no, no, no," very Jewish, among other things, very interrupting, you spoke only in interruptions. So that was a wonderful atmosphere for me to be in. And second, the problem they are looking at then, the problem they are looking at is a very, very difficult problem of how to be able to prevent them from being able to destroy all of your weapons on the ground with a surprise attack.

Let me get very quickly to an issue that became a specialty of my way of thinking and not coincidentally. I've said that my thinking had expanded from entirely the two-person zero sum game to thinking very broadly of bargaining and conflict situations – more broadly than classical and mathematical game theorists tended to do. But also game theory itself had developed, a branch of it developed in what came to be known as decision theory where your actions have uncertain consequences but those consequences don't depend on an identifiable or a specific adversary.

So at first they were conceptualized as games against nature where the events that will determine the outcomes of your actions, the uncertain alternative events are not being chose by some hostile adversary altogether in a game but it's like the weather or volcanoes, catastrophic things, or just the way things are, nobody is choosing but you don't know the way things are, you're not facing just an adversary.

The question of how to choose reasonably when you simply don't know what the questions of the outcomes will be, the stock market. It's the difference in economic terms between oligopoly or duopoly where you are really facing one, two, or three identifiable adversaries, where game theory is applied to the classic theory of pure competition where you are up against so many adversaries that no one intelligence is choosing all of them. It's like predicting the stock market. So you don't have a controlling factor against you.